

White River Powerline Project Action Plan (2/03/03)

Project Description:

The White River Powerline project is a proactive initiative to reduce fuels buildup on key powerlines in the D4 fire management polygon immediately Southwest of Meeker, Colorado.

Purpose and need for the project:

There are two important objectives associated with the proposed project:

- 1) Reduction of hazardous fuels along the electrical powerline identified by Rio Blanco County as the most important “urban interface” issue in the county, and
- 2) Enhanced suppression alternatives within the D4 “Little Hills” fire management polygon that consists of 133,000 acres. Fire suppression alternatives would be more flexible if we were able to mitigate the fire danger associated with the powerlines.

The powerlines in question serve local communities, and energy and mineral operations.

Method/type and acreage of treatment:

There are 28 miles of line and 181 pairs of poles of powerlines in the D 4 polygon. The Field Office and the Fire Zone are currently evaluating options. A key question to answer is: "Do we want to guarantee the safety of a short stretch, or address the worst fuel pockets here and there along the entire line network?" We are currently developing some analysis sufficient to hold a comprehensive discussion relating to these important choices.

It is expected that the project will ultimately treat, through mechanical and/or prescribed fire methods, around 250 acres. The figure below provides an overview of one at risk reach of line.

Preliminary Treatment Parcels – American Soda Line Segment:



Partners and collaborators:

The following partners and collaborators have been identified to date:

White River Field Office
Northwest Colorado Fire Management Zone
Rio Blanco County Colorado
White River Rural Electric Association

Coordination meetings with the White River Rural Electric Association (REA) will be scheduled in the near future. Hopefully these meetings will help identify the alternatives to pursue and determine the REA's willingness to provide support funding.

Biomass generated and opportunities for biomass utilization:

The fuels in the area are largely un-merchantable Pinyon Juniper and Mountain Shrub communities. There may be opportunities for fuelwood sales, but all safety issues must first be addressed.

How the project will be completed (i.e., force account, contract, partners, etc.)

Numerous options relating to the physical methods such as prescribed fire or mechanical treatment of fuels have yet to be determined. Safety considerations associated with people working near 138,000 volts will dictate our tactics. These safety concerns have yet to be fully evaluated.

Anticipated project completion date. (If project implementation is phased over several years, describe amount to be completed each year.)

It's our expectation that the mechanical treatments in D4 Polygon can be completed in 1-2 calendar years. The number of miles/poles at risk is still being evaluated. Many mile of line are found at elevations that entail deep snow accumulations. Project objectives and terrain should allow access year round. Machine availability and weather (snow/mud) may hamper operations (hence 2 calendar years)

Prescribed fire operations would be spread over multiple years to allow grazing adjustments (rest/rotation etc) and minimize impacts on critical deer winter range.

Preliminary Interdisciplinary Core Team Members:

Dan Sokol: Leader Northwest Colorado Fuels team

Jim Cagney: White River Associate Field Manger

Garner Harris: Forman Northwest Colorado South Zone

Dale Beckerman: Fire Management Specialist

The White River Staff will conduct the environmental analysis in conjunction with the Northwest Colorado Fuels team

Project Planning and Implementation Support Needs:

None identified

Planned Timeline for Project:

Activity	# Days	Jan 22	Marc h 1	Marc h 31	May 15	June 1	June 15	July 1	July 15			
Project Initiation		X										
Public issue identification period			X									
Identify Issues/Develop Proposal and Alternatives	30			X								
T&E Surveys					X							
Cultural Resource Survey/Tribal Consultation	45				X							
Initiate contracting discussions for implementation actions					X							
SHPO Concurrence if required	30						X					
EA to Public for review	30					X						
Sign FONSI & DR								X				
Issue implementation contracts									X			